

Newbery Lists for the Many Needs of Students and Teachers

by Ed Spicer

Since 1922 the John Newbery Medal has been awarded to a book that, in the eyes of the committee members, demonstrates the most significant contribution to children's literature of all eligible books published in the preceding year. While you and I may disagree about what is or is not selected, this award has often produced literature that is truly stunning and that continues to command our attention decades later.

However, classroom teachers often need high quality books to help with very specific classroom objectives and students often only want a very narrow range of titles. Over my twenty plus years reading and evaluating children's literature, here are some specific lists of five books featuring only those titles that have won the Newbery Medal or have been selected as a Newbery Honor.* These are books that are my personal favorites. (* a few exceptions to prove the rule)

I Need Nonfiction Books

All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team, written by Christina Soontornvat (Candlewick Press)

Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon by Steve Sheinkin (Flash Point/Roaring Brook Press)

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Scholastic)

Volcano: The Eruption and Healing of Mount St. Helens by Patricia Lauber (Bradbury)

The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights" by Russell Freedman (Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin)

What About Graphic Formats? (Room for improvement here!)

New Kid by Jerry Craft (HarperCollins)—First Graphic format to win the Newbery

El Deafo by Cece Bell (Amulet Books, an imprint of ABRAMS)—First graphic format honored

Roller Girl by Victoria Jamieson (Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin)—That's ALL!

American Born Chinese by Gene Luan Yang (First Second) —Okay, okay! This is a Printz winner and NOT a Newbery winner.

March: Book Three by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, & Nate Powell (Top Shelf Productions)—NOT a Newbery—just the National Book Award Winner, Printz Winner, Sibert Winner...

Will My Students Like It?

This list needs some context. The Newbery is NOT a popularity award even though the hope is that all readers will love it. The Newbery is an award given to the book that has a significant contribution to children's literature, regardless of its popularity. This often causes arguments by those who believe that quality books in the children's literature world are directly related to the number of children who love them. However, sometimes really amazing books with a more limited appeal win (and, in my opinion, NEED to win). But I was a classroom teacher and understand why teachers sometimes need popular books. So here are my five Newbery books of the top of my head (at this moment in time) that have mass appeal (or SHOULD have mass appeal):

Holes by Louis Sachar (Frances Foster)

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson (Crowell)

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E. L. Konigsburg (Atheneum)

My Father's Dragon by Ruth S. Gannett (Random House)

Incident At Hawk's Hill by Allan W. Eckert (Little, Brown)

I Want To Be Scared a Bit (or more)!

Doll Bones by Holly Black (Margaret K. McElderry Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing)

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman, illus. by Dave McKean (HarperCollins)

The Underneath by Kathi Appelt, illus. by David Small (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster)

Scary Stories for Young Foxes by Christian McKay Heidicker (Macmillan)

The Dark-thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural by Patricia McKissack (Knopf)

Black Lives Matter

Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum/Simon & Schuster Children's)

Piecing Me Together by Renée Watson (Bloomsbury)

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia (Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins)

Somewhere in the Darkness by Walter Dean Myers (Scholastic Hardcover)

Carver: A Life In Poems by Marilyn Nelson (Front Street)

The Undefeated written by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by Kadir Nelson (Verisfy / Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) Yeah this section has six—it could have MORE!

Literature Language and Poetry Power

The Crossover by Kwame Alexander (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jaqueline Woodson (Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Group LLC)

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village by Laura Amy Schlitz (Candlewick)

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse (Scholastic)

The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin (Dutton)

His Story and Her Story and Our History

New Kid by Jerry Craft (HarperCollins)

Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life by Ashley Bryan by Ashley Bryan (Atheneum / Simon & Schuster)

The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom by Margarita Engle (Henry Holt)

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor (Dial)

The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani (Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers, a division of Penguin Random House)

Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut written by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James (Bolden / Agate)—You counted!?

Retro Picks: Books Published Before 2000 That Still Hold Up

The Thief by Megan Whalen Turner (Greenwillow / Morrow) 1997

Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary (Morrow) 1982

Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel (Harper) 1973

The Black Cauldron by Lloyd Alexander (Holt) 1966

The Secret River by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (Scribner) 1955

EMPATHY Reads! (books that build and show empathy)

The View from Saturday by E.L. Konigsburg (Jean Karl/ Atheneum)

The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering, (Candlewick Press)

Rules by Cynthia Lord (Scholastic)

The Watsons Go to Birmingham: 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis (Delacorte)

Hello, Universe by Erin Entrada Kelly (Greenwillow/ HarperCollins)

Funny Books!

Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos (Farrar Straus Giroux)

Surviving the Applewhites by Stephanie S. Tolan (HarperCollins)

A Long Way from Chicago by Richard Peck (Dial)

Everything on a Waffle by Polly Horvath (Farrar Straus Giroux)

Doctor DeSoto by William Steig (Farrar)

Take Me Around the World

Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga (HarperCollins)

The War that Saved my Life by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (Dial Books for Young Readers/ Penguin)

Heart of a Samurai by Margi Preus (Amulet Books, an imprint of Abrams)

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin (Little, Brown and Company Books for Young Readers)

A Single Shard by Linda Sue Park (Clarion Books/ Houghton Mifflin)

BONUS LISTS (from other ALA committees)

Best of the Printz Winners and Honors

Okay! I'm not going to include ANY of the 2005 Printz books because that was my year helping to select winners. I'm sure that you already love *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff, *Airborn* by Kenneth Oppel, *Chanda's Secrets* by Allan Straton, and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Southwest Michigan's own Gary Schmidt. That could have left me with just one additional title (and I would not have ever been able to finish this list)! As it is I already know that I will leave MANY fabulous books off this list. My sorting criteria will be books that may be just a bit under the radar in my estimation. Titles that have a bold font are winners; titles without are honor books. Feel very free to email me or contact me for additional recommendations (edspicer@mac.com):

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

Ship Breaker by Paolo Bacigalupi

Scorpio Races, by Maggie Stiefvater

Going Bovine by Libba Bray (I am quoted, long before the awards were announced, saying something very close to: "If the Printz Committee has any guts at all they will choose this hysterical mashup of Don Quixote, Norse mythology, and a very twisted road trip as this year's Printz winner.")

Hard Love, by Ellen Wittlinger (From the very first Printz award that also featured Walter Dean Myers' **Monster** and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*—in my opinion this one is EVERY BIT AS Deserving, but then so too is *Skellig* by David Almond)

Schneider Family Book Awards

This is a committee I adore. I served on it for three years and chaired it in my last year (2019). We all know or should know the danger of the single story, sometimes sarcastically referred to as the "one Black friend book," where a single character represents ALL characters with a single trait, such as skin color, religion, etc. Often we only see a single character who is blind or deaf or missing a limb, if at all. And those characters go on to represent ALL blind characters, etc. The Schneider Family Book Awards hope to present a fuller, more realistic portrayal of the disability experience. The committee selects a teen winner, a middle grade winner, and a picture book winner. I am very proud to say that during my tenure on this great committee, we added the ability to choose honor books! Here are five books that I love. Again I will assume that you will look up ALL of the books from 2017 to 2019 so I do not need to include *Rescue and Jessica: A life changing friendship* by Jessica Kensky, Patrick Downes, and Scott Magoon; *The Remember Balloons* by Jessie Oliveros and Dana Wulfekotte; *The*

Truth as Told by Mason Buttle by Leslie Connor; The Collectors by Jacqueline West; Anger is a Gift by Mark Oshiro; (Don't) Call Me Crazy: 33 Voices Start the Conversation about Mental Health edited by Kelly Jensen; Silent Days, Silent Dreams by Allan Say; Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess by Shari Green; You're Welcome, Universe by Whitney Gardner; Six Dots: A Story of Young Louise Braille by Jen Bryan and Boris Kulikov; as brave as you by Jason Reynolds; When We Collided by Emery Lord. Here are five (of MANY) great books:

Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah by Laurie Ann Thompson and Sean Qualls

Five Flavors of Dumb by John Antony

Becoming Naomi León by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Rules by Cynthia Lord

The Deaf Musicians by Paul DeBois, Pete Seeger, and Gregory R. Christie

Hurt Go Happy by Ginny Rorby (Sometimes I have trouble counting)

The William C. Morris YA Debut Award

Of all the award committees I have been on, this one is often the one I list as my favorite. For one thing, I served under Teri Lesesne, the GODDESS OF YA LITERATURE, and a friend that I would chat with on the phone for hours about books and goofiness and struggles and life. Teri recently died and I miss my friend. Our particular Morris Committee, however, is one for the ages. As a reminder, the Morris Committee awards prizes for an author's very first, debut publication, not just their YA debut, but their first time in print period. Choosing these books is tremendously exciting! Our winner, John Corey Whaley, not only was our winner, but also won the Printz award for *Where Things Come Back* (and WOW was that ALA Press Conference exciting—the Printz Committee was VERY relieved after we announced our winner, I learned)! Jenny Hubbard's second novel received a Printz honor the very next year. *Paper Covers Rock* was her debut and one of our finalists. Rae Carson (*The Girl of Fire and Thorns*) has produced one great fantasy after another and is a feature on bestseller lists. Guadalupe Garcia McCall, like John Corey Whaley, was a double winner in 2012. She also won the Pura Belpré author award for the book that is also our Morris Finalist, *Under the Mesquite*. And Ruta Sepetys has gone on to amazing international success not only with our finalist, *Between Shades of Gray*, but with many of the books that came after. This was an amazing year for debuts and I was on the right committee at the right time! Our authors are still publishing and still selling and still winning awards. I hope some future Morris member has an equally splendid or even better experience. This award is a fairly young award so I think this possibility is very likely. As of today, here are five truly excellent Morris winners or finalists (not from my 2012 year) written by

authors we are still reading today whose careers blasted off after getting their start with the William C. Morris Committee:

The Hate U Give written by Angie Thomas

Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda written by Becky Albertalli

Graceling written by Kristin Cashore

The Scar Boys written by Len Vlahos (who now operates the Tattered Cover bookstores in Denver)

Dear Martin written by Nic Stone

The Caldebery List

And finally here is a very short list of the only two excellent picture books that have won both Newbery and Caldecott recognition. My Caldecott experience was in 2009. Our Committee chose *The House in the Night*, illustrated by Beth Krommes, written by Susan Marie Swanson (Houghton Mifflin Company) as our winner. Our three honor books were *A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever* by Marla Frazee (Harcourt, Inc.); *How I Learned Geography* by Uri Shulevitz (Farrar Straus Giroux); and *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams*, illustrated by Melissa Sweet, written by Jen Bryant (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.). Please take a look at these! To reach five books, I looked at books that won a Caldecott and another ALA award:

Last Stop on Market Street, illustrated by Christian Robinson, written by Matt de la Peña (G.P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin)

The Undefeated, illustrated by Kadir Nelson, written by Kwame Alexander (Versify, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Thank You, Omu!, illustrated and written by Oge Mora (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers/Hachette)—John Steptoe Award from the Coretta Scott King also in 2019

A Different Pond, illustrated by Thi Bui, written by Bao Phi (Capstone Young Readers/Capstone)—also an APALA Picture Book Award winner in 2018

Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut, illustrated by Gordon C. James, written by Derrick Barnes (Bolden/Agate)—also a 2018 Coretta Scott King Illustration Honor